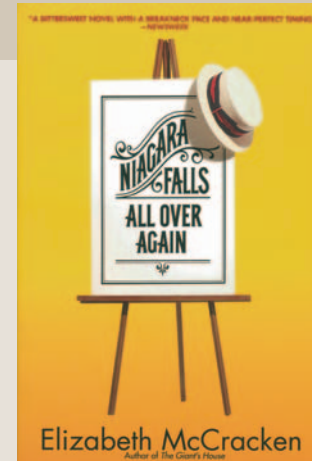
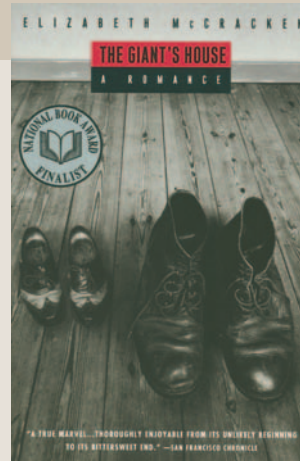
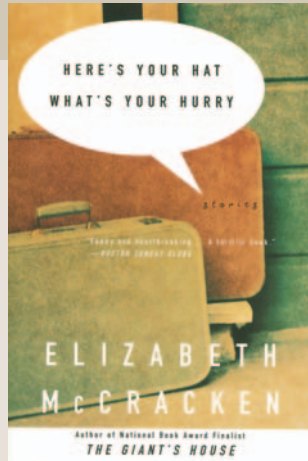


EVERYONE'S



READING...

Elizabeth McCracken



Reader's Guide

February 1 – April 16, 2005

What Is Everyone's Reading

Elizabeth McCracken?

Everyone's Reading... is a community-wide reading event sponsored by seven Metro Detroit public libraries. Similar to the *One Book, One Community* programs across the country, *Everyone's Reading* promotes community dialogue by encouraging people to read and discuss the same book.

This year's *Everyone's Reading* event features author Elizabeth McCracken and her three books.



Previous selections:

2002 — *Pay It Forward* by Catherine Ryan Hyde

2003 — *A Lesson Before Dying* by Ernest J. Gaines

2004 — *Saul and Patsy* by Charles Baxter

Why read Elizabeth McCracken?

This is the first year the popular reading program has featured multiple books by an author. Readers and critics have praised Elizabeth McCracken as a fresh voice in fiction whose writing offers offbeat but endearing characters, snappy dialogue and seamless plots. *Everyone's Reading* includes the three works of Elizabeth McCracken to give you a number of opportunities to experience this young author early in her already acclaimed writing career.

McCracken— who was recognized by Granta magazine as one of the twenty “Best American Novelists” under forty— is a National Book Award finalist. She has won the Barnes and Noble “Discover Great New Writers Award” and an award from the American Library Association for “Notable Book of the Year.” *Everyone's Reading Elizabeth McCracken* offers you the chance to sample the books of this fine storyteller with her original voice.

How can I participate in *Everyone's Reading Elizabeth McCracken*?

Read any — or all — of Elizabeth McCracken's books.

Pick up a copy at one of the participating public libraries.

Attend the program kickoff.

Hear renowned audiobook narrator George Guidall talk about his recording of *Niagara Falls All Over Again* and his experiences narrating books.

Tuesday, February 22 at 7:30 PM

Farmington Community Main Library

See page 8 for details.

Discuss the books and participate in programs.

Use this Reader's Guide to lead your own book discussion group or attend one of the special *Everyone's Reading* events listed in this guide and at www.everonesreading.info

Meet the author.

Elizabeth McCracken will speak and sign books during National Library Week. A schedule of appearances appears on page 5.

Special Events for Everyone's Reading

Elizabeth McCracken

Program Kickoff

Audiobook narrator George Guidall talks about his recording of *Niagara Falls All Over Again* and his experiences narrating more than 600 books.

Tuesday, February 22 at 7:30 PM

Farmington Community Main Library

Please call 248-553-0300 for a reservation.

Discussions of Elizabeth McCracken's books

Book discussion of *Niagara Falls All over Again*

Thursday, February 3 at 1 PM

Costick Center (28600 11 Mile Rd., Farmington Hills)

Please call 248-553-0300 for a reservation.

Friends of the Canton Public Library Contemporary Book Discussion Group talks about *Niagara Falls All Over Again*

Monday, February 21 at 7 PM

Canton Public Library Community Room

Evening Book Discussion Group discusses *The Giant's House: A Romance* and the writing of Elizabeth McCracken

Tuesday, March 8 at 7:30 PM

Independence Township Library

Reading Between the Lines book discussion group examines *Niagara Falls All Over Again*

Tuesday, March 8 at 10 AM

Thursday, March 10 at 7:30 PM

West Bloomfield Township Public Library

Cover to Cover book group discusses

Niagara Falls All Over Again

Thursday, March 10 from 10 – 11:30 AM

Bloomfield Township Public Library

Lunch and a Book discussion of all three Elizabeth McCracken titles

Thursday, March 10 from Noon – 1 PM

Canton Public Library Community Room

Discuss all three Elizabeth McCracken titles.

Thursday, March 10 at 2 PM or 7:30 PM

Baldwin Public Library

Between the Lines book group discusses

Niagara Falls All Over Again

Wednesday, March 16 from 10 – 11:30 AM

Rochester Hills Public Library

Registration limited; please call 248-650-7150

Between the Lines book group discusses

The Giant's House: A Romance

Thursday, March 17 from 1:30 – 3 PM

Rochester Hills Public Library

Registration limited; please call 248-650-7150.

Why is everyone reading Elizabeth McCracken?

Maureen Dunphy of Oakland University explores

McCracken's three titles

Tuesday, March 22 at 7:30 PM

Baldwin Public Library

Friends of the Library BOOKTalk features Sandra Sutherland and

a review of *The Giant's House: A Romance* as well as a discussion of

McCracken's other books

Wednesday, March 23 at 7:30 PM

West Bloomfield Township Public Library

Popular Book Discussion Group features

The Giant's House: A Romance

Thursday, March 24 at 10 AM

Farmington Community Branch Library

Please call 248-553-0300 for a reservation.

Hooked on Books discussion of *Here's Your Hat What's*

Your Hurry: Stories

Monday, April 4 at 7 PM

Farmington Community Main Library

Please call 248-553-0300 for a reservation.

Comedy in America: From Vaudeville to Television

Rabbi Sherwin Wine explores the development of American comedy, the subject of *Niagara Falls All Over Again*, at 7 PM at the following libraries:

Wednesday, February 2

Bloomfield Township Public Library

Thursday, February 10

Baldwin Public Library

Thursday, February 17

West Bloomfield Township Public Library

Wednesday, March 30

Farmington Community Main Library

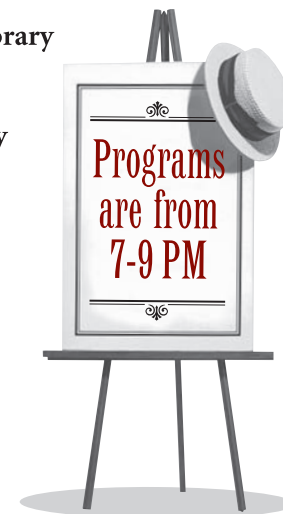
Wednesday, April 6

Rochester Hills Public Library

Registration limited, please call

248-650-7150.

See pages 5 and 8 for library locations.



About the Author

Elizabeth McCracken

Elizabeth McCracken is a novelist and short story writer whose work has been praised for both its endearing characters and its storylines about loving relationships.

Her first book—*Here's Your Hat What's Your Hurry* (1993)—a collection of stories, showcased her sense of humor and talent for creating unforgettable characters. “I believe that most people are extraordinary,” says McCracken. “To me that is one of the pleasures of fiction; getting to know characters in a complex way—in a way that you sometimes don’t get to know mere acquaintances.”

The Giant's House: A Romance, her second book and first novel, is a tender and quirky novel about a lonely librarian’s love for the world’s tallest boy. “I think our lives are constantly transformed by love,” says McCracken. “Not just what we think of as romantic love—love with the person you sleep with. But that our daily lives are constantly shaped by the people we love: our friends, our families.”

McCracken’s next novel, *Niagara Falls All Over Again*, chronicles a two-man comedy team and their flawed, passionate friendship over thirty years, weaving a powerful story of family and love, grief and loss. “I’ve always been curious about deep love that is not romantic,” says McCracken. “I think that it’s so interesting because movies and books always have this giant emphasis on romantic sexual love, of which I am strongly in favor, but there are so many other varieties of love.”

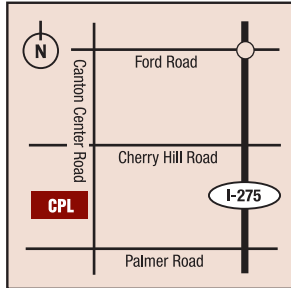
Elizabeth McCracken was born in 1966 and grew up in Boston. She attended Boston University, received a Master’s degree in Fine Arts from the University of Iowa and earned a Master’s degree of Library Science at Drexel University. In addition to her books, she has been published in the *New York Times Magazine* and *Esquire*.

After working in libraries from the age of 15, Elizabeth McCracken now writes full-time and resides in Somerville, Massachusetts. She is working on her fourth book.

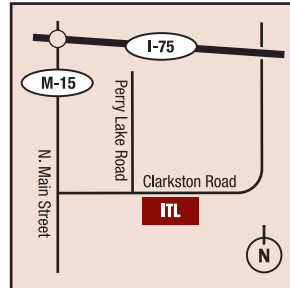


Meet the author

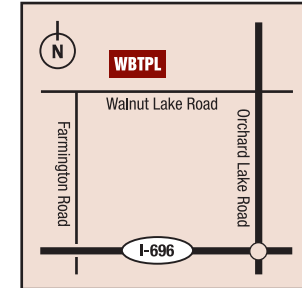
Elizabeth McCracken will speak and sign books during National Library Week.



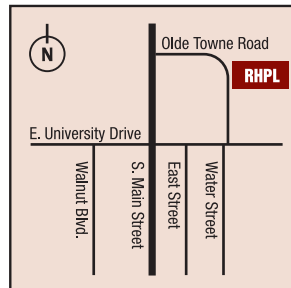
Wednesday, April 13, 7 PM
Canton Public Library
 1200 S. Canton Center Road, Canton
Call 734-397-0999 to register.



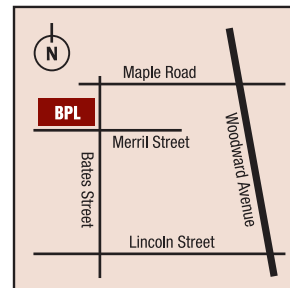
Thursday, April 14, 3:30 PM
Independence Township Library
 6495 Clarkston Road, Clarkston
Call 248-625-2212 to register.



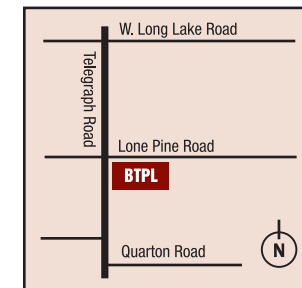
Thursday, April 14, 7 PM
West Bloomfield Township Public Library
 4600 Walnut Lake Road, West Bloomfield
Call 248-682-2120 for details.



Friday, April 15, 3:30 PM
Rochester Hills Public Library
 500 Olde Towne Road, Rochester
Call 248-650-7150 to register.



Friday, April 15, 7:30 PM
Baldwin Public Library
 300 W. Merrill Street, Birmingham
Call 248-647-1700 for details.



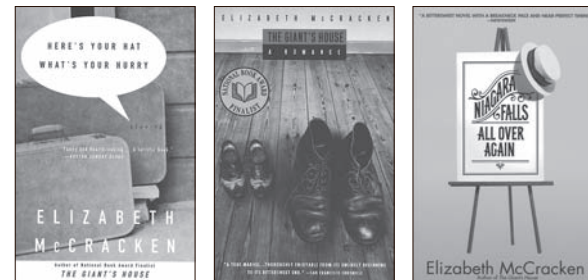
Saturday, April 16, 2 PM
Bloomfield Township Public Library
 1099 Lone Pine Road, Bloomfield Hills
Call 248-642-5800 to register.

All three of Elizabeth McCracken's books explore human relationships and the nature of love.

Here's Your Hat What's Your Hurry: Stories has been praised by reviewers for its eccentric characters and its elegant writing style. In the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, Francine Prose wrote, "McCracken's attention to detail and to the truths of the human heart, her ear for the rhythms of speech, her wry, straightforward and commonsensical literary voice ground even the most fantastic tales in solid . . . reality."

Her first novel, *The Giant's House: A Romance*, has been called a modern fairy tale. The year is 1950, and in a small town on Cape Cod, twenty-six-year-old librarian Peggy Cort feels like love and life have stood her up. Until the day James Carlson Sweatt—the "over-tall" eleven-year-old boy who's the talk of the town—walks into her library and changes her life forever. Two misfits whose lonely paths cross at the reference desk, Peggy and James are odd candidates for friendship, but nevertheless they find their lives entwined in ways that neither one could have predicted. And as James grows—six foot five at age twelve, then seven feet, then eight—so does Peggy's heart and their most singular romance. According to *BookPage* reviewer Laura Reynolds Adler, "In the hands of McCracken, this unusual, unconsummated love story about a librarian who finds the courage to love is not scandalous, but sweet and inevitable."

Spanning the waning years of vaudeville and the golden age of Hollywood, *Niagara Falls All Over Again* chronicles a flawed, passionate friendship over thirty years, weaving a powerful story of family and love, grief and loss. In it, McCracken introduces her most singular and affecting hero: Mose Sharp — son, brother, husband, father, friend ... and straight man to the fat guy in baggy pants who utterly transforms his life. A reviewer for the *New York Times Book Review* said, "McCracken manages to consider an impressive number of substantial ideas, to ruminate on subjects like the comic impulse, the eroticism of partnership, the congruencies and differences between the theatrical and the authentic, the compulsions that might lead someone to become an entertainer, the payoffs and drawbacks of sacrificing one's personal life for art."



Discussion Questions

Elizabeth McCracken

1. Both of McCracken's novels, and most of her short stories, are told in a first person narrative. What freedom—or limits—does this give the author?
2. McCracken uses a conversational tone of voice in much of her writing. How do you think this affects the quality of the language she uses?
3. Because there is so much emphasis on characters in McCracken's stories and books, do you think that the plots are less important to the reader?
4. The theme of loss of a loved one—to death, desertion, or betrayal—is a constant theme in McCracken's fiction. Do you think this makes her work sad? Realistic?
5. Love and relationships between mismatched couples are at the core of McCracken's work. Why do you think McCracken writes about such couples?

Here's Your Hat What's Your Hurry: Stories

1. Many of the characters in these stories are almost sideshow characters or at least are atypical physically. Why do you think the author uses such unusual people?
2. The families in these stories are far from traditional. What do you think McCracken is saying about familial love and “family values”?

The Giant's House: A Romance

1. Although there is a 14-year age difference between Peggy and James, her love for him does not shock us. How does this age difference affect their feelings for each other and the reader's feelings about them?
2. Peggy is a librarian, and much of her self-image is based on her profession. What do you think about librarians and libraries after reading this book? Do you think the library world has changed since Peggy's tenure as a small-town librarian in the 1950s?
3. Although Peggy opens her narrative with “I do not love mankind,” this novel is all about love. What is McCracken telling us about love in its many forms: romantic, parental and otherwise?

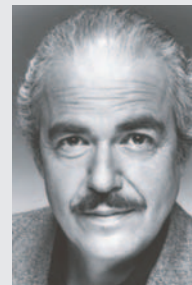
Niagara Falls All Over Again

1. McCracken is a lifelong devotee of old movies, especially Laurel and Hardy. What do you think is the timeless appeal of slapstick comedy?
2. Mike Sharp, the narrator, feels that he has suffered an unfair amount of loss in his life. Why do you think he feels this way, and how does his life contrast to that of the other characters, especially Rocky?
3. How do Rocky and Mose relate to the women in their lives? What roles do women play in the novel?
4. The theatrical career of Carter and Sharp mirrors the lives of other comedy teams like Laurel and Hardy or Abbott and Costello. What similarities and what differences do you see?

About Audiobook Narrator George Guidall

Widely recognized as the world's most prolific narrator of audiobooks, George Guidall has recorded nearly 650 unabridged novels, bringing a consistent artistry to his readings that has delighted listeners for over 20 years. His narrations of everything from classics like *Crime and Punishment* and *The Iliad* to best sellers like *Snow Falling on Cedars* and Lilian Jackson Brauns' *Cat Who ...* series have set a standard for excellence recognized throughout the audiobook industry. In 1999, Guidall received the coveted Audie Award—the industry equivalent of an Oscar—for best unabridged narration of a novel for his recording of John Irving's *A Widow for One Year*, an honor he captured again in 2000 for his rendition of Wally Lamb's *I Know This Much Is True*

Guidall also has enjoyed a forty-year career in the theatre, including starring roles on Broadway in such plays as *Chapter Two*, *Cafe Crown*, *Alone Together* and *Cold Storage*. He has received an Obie award for best performance Off-Broadway and has shared the stage at the New York Shakespeare Festival with Kevin Kline, Morgan Freeman, Meryl Streep and Tracy Ullman. His early career featured a tour of Europe and the Near East with Helen Hayes in *The Glass Menagerie*, *Miracle Worker* and *The Skin of Our Teeth*. He has also appeared many times on television, most recently as Judge Simmons on ABC's daytime series *One Life to Live*, as well as on other popular series such as *Law and Order*, *Spencer for Hire* and *The Equalizer*. His film credits include *Malcom X*, *Tales from the Darkside* and *Golden Gate*.

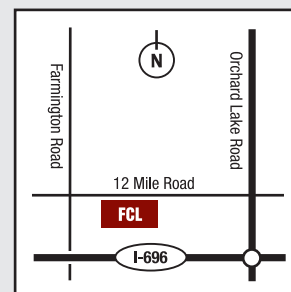


George Guidall will talk about his recording of *Niagara Falls All Over Again* and his experiences narrating books.

Tuesday, February 22 at 7:30 PM

Farmington Community Main Library

For a reservation, please call 248-553-0300.



32737 W. 12 Mile Road, Farmington Hills

Movies that relate to the themes in the books of Elizabeth McCracken

Odd Couples and Misfits

The Door in the Floor (2004)

Adapted from John Irving's novel *A Widow for One Year*, this alternately tragic and comic film explores the complexities of love. Haunted by a family tragedy, the beautiful wife of a famous children's book author begins an affair with the much younger man who is a summer intern for her husband.

Harold and Maude (1971)

Cult classic explores the meaning of life by pairing a disillusioned 20-year-old obsessed with suicide and a fun-loving, 80-year-old eccentric woman who meet at a funeral and develop a taboo romantic relationship.

The Heart is a Lonely Hunter (1968)

John Singer, like James Sweatt (*The Giant's House*), is physically set apart from the people around him. Unlike James, he is never able to "reach out and touch someone," and when he dies, it is by his own hand. Based on the novel by Carson McCullers.

The Station Agent (2003)

A reclusive dwarf and train enthusiast takes up residence in an abandoned train station, which he has inherited. Incurably chatty Joe and melancholy Olivia intrude on his solitude, replacing isolation with friendship. A librarian figures in the story, also.

Wise Blood (1979)

Classic Southern gothic based on the Flannery O'Connor novel. Physical and spiritual misfits make their peace with the world they live in. Superb, very dark comedy directed by John Huston.

Giants in a Too-Small World

Big Fish (2003)

An alienated grown son tries to sort out the truth from the fiction in his dying father's stories of his life, which include tales of battling a huge catfish, adventures with a circus giant, the Korean War, how he courted his wife and the idyllic town where he grew up.

My Giant (1998)

A down-on-his-luck movie agent (Billy Crystal) is rescued from an auto accident in Romania by a 7-foot man. The agent wants to cash in on the giant, but the giant is only interested in going to America to reunite with a childhood girlfriend.

Of Mice and Men (1939 and 1992)

A powerful adaptation of the John Steinbeck tragedy about the friendship between the mentally retarded gentle giant, Lenny, and the migrant worker, George, who cares for him. They both get into an irreversible situation when a woman is accidentally killed.

Comics and Straight Men

Abbott and Costello Meet the Mummy (1955)

The comedy duo is stranded in Egypt with a valuable medallion that will lead to secret treasure and the mummy who guards the tomb. This was the last film they made for Universal.

Buck Privates (1941)

Abbott and Costello star as dim-witted tie salesmen, running from the law, who become buck privates during WWII. This is the duo's first great success and established the formula for each subsequent film.

Comics and Straight Men (cont.)

***Hollywood or Bust* (1956)**

Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis head for Tinsel Town to meet Jerry's dream girl, Anita Ekberg. This is the last movie Martin and Lewis made together.

***Road to Morocco* (1942)**

Bob Hope and Bing Crosby are stranded and broke in Morocco. To get some money, Crosby sells Hope into slavery to be the princess's personal plaything. Hilarious complications ensue. One of the funniest in The Road movies series. Watch for the camel at the end.

***The Stooge* (1953)**

Dean Martin is an unsuccessful vaudeville performer until his handlers convince him to become an act that uses Jerry Lewis as a stooge, a guy planted in the audience who is the butt of Martin's jokes. But Jerry begins to steal the show and helps keep Dean on his toes. Dean's girlfriend and pals tell him to make Jerry an equal partner. Complications occur, while Dean sings and Jerry gets the laughs.

***The Sunshine Boys* (1975)**

George Burns and Walter Matthau star as veteran vaudeville partners who have shared a love-hate relationship for decades and now must reunite for a TV special. Adapted from the play by Neil Simon.

Libraries on the Big Screen

It's no surprise that libraries play a role in Elizabeth McCracken's writing since the author worked for years in libraries.

***The Gun in Betty Lou's Handbag* (1992)**

A shy, small town librarian with a dull marriage is looking for excitement when she stumbles across a gun used in a murder. Her false confession to the crime leaves her husband thunderstruck, the police confused, and the gossip line humming.

***The Music Man* (1962)**

Marian the librarian of River City, Iowa finds romance with con artist Professor Harold Hill in this classic American musical.

***Party Girl* (1995)**

The saga of a 20-something Manhattan club gal who needs some steady income after the cops bust her for throwing an illegal rent party. Since her godmother is a librarian, she gets a job as a library clerk and discovers the wonders of the Dewey Decimal System.

***You're a Big Boy Now* (1966)**

A comedy in which a 19 year old page in the New York Public Library tries to make his way through the usual rites of passage in a series of unusual encounters. His mother tries her best to retain his innocence but his father, a librarian in the rare book collection, has other ideas. Many scenes were filmed at the NYPL.

Film descriptions taken from VideoHound's Golden Movie Retriever 2005, Internet Movie Database and Novelist.

Interested in finding other movies that feature libraries and librarians? You can find 175 movies, annotated of course, at <http://emp.byui.edu/raishm/films/agroup.html>

Comedy from Vaudeville to Television 1840–1950

1840

The Boston “Vaudeville Saloon” opens its doors for the first Vaudeville variety show in the United States.

1875

Vaudeville becomes the most popular form of entertainment in North America.

1881

Tony Pastor presents the first “clean” variety show playing to both men and women in New York.

1895

Vaudeville theaters are among the first of America’s venues to present the novelty of motion pictures.

1899

Houdini (Erik Weisz) is booked on the Orpheum Circuit.

1900

Buster Keaton’s sense of humor, impeccable timing, and athletic prowess earns him the title of “simply the best stunt man ever.”

1904

Will Rogers makes his vaudeville debut at the Cleveland Theater in Chicago

1906

W.C. Fields ends his two-year run in the musical *Ham Tree*, which consisted of Vaudeville acts tied together by a thin plot.

1908

Edward Gallagher and Albert Schoenberg perform together as Gallagher & Shean. Most widely known was their theme song “Mister Gallagher and Mister Shean,” which was to become a hit at the Ziegfeld Follies in 1922.

1912

The Marx Brothers, all four, present vaudeville shows through 1936.

1913

The Palace Theater opens in New York and plays two shows a day, with reserved seating.

1917

Fred Astaire appears on stage at the age of seven with his sister Adele.

1920

Jackie “Moms” Mabley becomes one of the most popular and successful entertainers ever to grace the black vaudeville stage.

Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy appear in vaudeville. Charlie was a puppet who became Bergen’s lifelong sidekick.

1921

Burns and Allen first perform together at a New Jersey theater. They are paid five dollars.

1926

Laurel and Hardy’s partnership at the Hal Roach Studio begins.

Comedy from Vaudeville to Television 1840–1950 (cont.)

1928

Vaudeville is at the height of its popularity. Two million people attend performances daily.

Bill Bojangles Robinson is hired for a revue called “Blackbirds of 1928.”

Joseph P. Kennedy begins to convert vaudeville theaters into RKO movie houses.

1929

The film debut of the Marx Brothers in *Cocoanuts*.

The first Academy Awards were handed out on May 16 at a ceremony held at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel. Attendance was 250 and tickets cost \$10.

1930

The Three Stooges debut in their first feature film *Soup to Nuts*.

1931

Abbott and Costello begin their career performing together in burlesque shows, minstrel shows, vaudeville and movie houses.

1932

The Three Stooges act featuring the Horwitz brothers and sometime Stoogette Bonnie Bonnell is one of the biggest in vaudeville.

The Jack Benny program premiers on the radio.

Laurel and Hardy win an Oscar for their short subject *The Music Box*.

1933

The Palace Theater in New York, the last of the big vaudeville houses, closes its doors.

Frances Gumm, later known as Judy Garland, sings with the Gumm Sisters in vaudeville.

1940

Bob Hope teams with Bing Crosby and Dorothy Lamour in the first of *The Road* series, *The Road to Singapore*.

1945

Large-scale production of TV sets begins.

1950

The Jack Benny program first appears on television and becomes the second longest running comedy in the history of television.

The *Burns and Allen Show*, starring George Burns and Gracie Allen, premiers.

Timeline Sources

www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/vaudeville.html

www.members.rogers.com/vaudeville/index.html

“I’ve always been curious about deep love that is not romantic. I think that it’s so interesting because movies and books always have this giant emphasis on romantic sexual love, of which I am strongly in favor, but there are so many other varieties of love.”

– Elizabeth McCracken



Sponsored by the Metro Net Library Consortium of Michigan
www.everyonesreading.info

EVERYONE'S READING...

Elizabeth McCracken

Here's Your Hat What's Your Hurry: Stories • The Giant's House: A Romance • Niagara Falls All Over Again

Reader's Guide

This guide was prepared by these Metro Net Libraries:

Baldwin Public Library • www.baldwinlib.org • (248) 647-1700

Bloomfield Township Public Library • www.btpl.org • (248) 642-5800

Canton Public Library • www.cantonpl.org • (734) 397-0999

Farmington Community Library • www.farmlib.org • (248) 553-0300

Independence Township Library • www.indelib.org • (248) 625-2212

Rochester Hills Public Library • www.rhpl.org • (248) 650-7150

West Bloomfield Township Public Library • www.wbplib.org • (248) 682-2120



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Other Participating Libraries:

Allen Park Public Library
Brandon Township Public Library
Northville District Library
Plymouth District Library
Public Library of Westland